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Sanctions Against Cuba

By a strange historic coincidence, the conference of the foreign ministers of the Organization of American States voted sanctions against the Castro Government on the same day that the Cuban regime was exuberantly celebrating its revolutionary anniversary of July 26.

The condemnation of Cuba was fully deserved, although the vote of 15 to 4 to punish the Castro regime can be taken as impressive or disappointing with equal justice. There was no question of Cuba's guilt in shipping arms to the revolutionary underground in Venezuela and doing everything possible to overthrow the Betancourt Government. The key provision in the resolution permits any nation to react immediately to a similar aggression. The vote will isolate Cuba still further in the Western hemisphere and there is a good chance now of Bolivia, Uruguay and Chile breaking diplomatic relations with Cuba. It is, therefore, legitimate for the United States to claim a victory.

The hemisphere, however, is still divided on the subject of Cuba. It took seven months to get an agreement on sanctions which, materially speaking, will not make much difference to Cuba. The United States already has a trade embargo and there is very little commerce to cut off between Cuba and the rest of Latin America. Despite the plea in the O.A.S. resolution, there is not the slightest chance of the rest of the world refusing to trade with Cuba so long as Fidel Castro has hard currency to spend.

The real issue in the much-feared subversion by Marxist-Leninist Cuba of Latin America is not a physical one. Premier Castro is not in a position to arm any Latin-American opposition effectively even if he wanted to, and his Communism has been a disillusionment, not an appeal, in the hemisphere.

The 26th of July celebrations underline Dr. Castro's effectiveness as a subversive agent. It is the fact that he and his regime survive after more than five and a half years of turmoil, economic collapse, the exodus of a great number of middle-class and professional elements, and after everything that the United States could do to him short of a military invasion, which gives him his greatest impact on Latin America. So long as he remains a towering figure on the hemispheric scene—hated, feared and despised by many, loved and admired by some—he will be a grave danger to Latin America and, because of his connections with Russia, to the United States.

The O.A.S. resolution just passed has the effect of a partial quarantine. It will not cause a collapse of the Castro regime, but it will make survival more difficult. In these respects, the conference of American ministers was notable.